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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 003511

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: KRG VIEWS ON SOFA, MALIKI, KIRKUK, MOSLAWI
CHRISTIANS, PKK, AND PRESIDENT-ELECT OBAMA

Classified By: Deputy PolCouns John Fox: Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) Summary: In a November 5 meeting, KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani was critical of PM Maliki's "double game" on the SOFA but believes Iraqi leaders will eventually sign it. He told how KRG President Masoud Barzani disappointed his Iranian hosts on his most recent visit to Tehran by praising the agreement on live Iranian TV. Nechirvan said there is little trust between Kurds and Arabs in Iraq, and especially between Maliki and Masoud, which will make more difficult both efforts to devise a compromise solution on Kirkuk and plans to integrate Peshmerga and Iraqi Army (IA) units. Nechirvan denied charges by some politicians that the Kurds are responsible for attacks on Christians in Mosul, and said the KRG will try to do a better job combating such allegations. He said the KRG wants a broad relationship with Turkey, not just talks on PKK. Masoud Barzani is scheduled to return to Iraq November 11, the same day a delegation from Turkish intelligence will arrive in Erbil. Nechirvan welcomed the election of President-elect Obama, arguing that Senator McCain would have continued the Administration's policy of supporting a strong central government in Baghdad. End summary.

12. (SBU) Senior Advisor for Northern Iraq Affairs Tom Krajeski and Poloff traveled to Erbil November 4-5. Joined by PRT Coordinator Lucy Tamlyn, they met with Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) November 5 for a review of current issues. A separate event on press freedom will be reported septel.

Resisting Iranian Pressure on the SOFA, Expecting Eventual Agreement

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13. (C) Consistent with other KRG statements, Nechirvan described the draft SOFA as "an honorable agreement, good for Iraq," which in his view is better than the U.S. agreement with South Korea or any other SOFA he knew of. He told the story of KRG President Masoud Barzani's recent visit to Iran, during which the Iranians sand-bagged Masoud with a live press conference shortly after his arrival. Their expectation was that Masoud would be asked about the SOFA and would demur in advance of his official meetings in Tehran. To the contrary, Masoud gave a hearty endorsement of the SOFA, all of which was broadcast live to the consternation of Iranian officials. In response, Iran cancelled a planned Masoud meeting with Supreme Leader Khamenei, to which the Kurds responded by cancelling a visit to Ayatollah Khomeini's grave.

14. (C) Nechirvan was critical of PM Maliki's "double game" throughout the SOFA negotiations, but he believes GOI leaders will "in the end" sign on. Iraqi politicians realize, he said, that Iraq is not strong enough militarily to do without U.S. help. They also worry that failure to extend the UNSCR or otherwise protect Iraqi financial assets from being attached would be a disaster. He said the Iraqi Mission in

Rome can't open bank accounts for fear of having them seized so must pay for everything in cash.

Solution for Kirkuk Made More Difficult by Lack of Trust Between Kurds and Arabs

15. (C) Compromise on Kirkuk will be essential, Nechirvan said, so that "all feel like they have won." He said the KRG would cooperate fully with the Article 23 committee established in the Provincial Elections Law to help determine Kirkuk's status since it is in the KRG's interest, but highlighted the need for a consensus outcome. S/A Krajieski flagged reports that land contracts to Arab farmers in Kirkuk are being cancelled and advised that such actions, even if implemented according to legal procedures, raise tensions and should be put on hold. Nechirvan did not address the specific issue (it is not clear whether he was aware of it), but responded by saying that solutions to political disputes are made more difficult by the lack of trust between Kurds and Arabs. Kurds believe Arab Iraqis want to postpone resolution of disputes until Baghdad is sufficiently strong that they can disregard Kurdish claims, he said. "We could postpone for three to six months, but we don't believe their intention is to solve problems."

More Complaints about Baghdad

16. (C) Nechirvan described the movement of Iraqi Army troops into Khanaqin, that was uncoordinated with local Peshmerga units, as "an alarm bell." After he encouraged Masoud to

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call PM Maliki and try to defuse the situation, Maliki would not accept his calls. Nechirvan said his office had been handling the communication back and forth and that he declined to pass to Masoud a disrespectful message from Maliki summoning Masoud to Baghdad. (Nechirvan said that if he had passed on the message to Masoud, Masoud would have just sent more Peshmerga to Diyala, which would have enflamed the situation.) Nechirvan expressed regret that Khanaqin was not handled better. The KRG is not opposed to having Peshmerga units replaced with IA units, he said, but "we will not accept being treated like that."

Defining Kurdish Loyalty in the ISF and to Iraq

17. (C) In contrast to his criticism of GOI actions in Khaneqin, Nechirvan praised the November 4-5 coordination meetings involving MNF/I officials and LTG Riyadh regarding the ongoing operations in Mosul. S/A Krajieski said that, as ISF competence increases, integration with Peshmerga should proceed so that the army, including the officer corps, represents all of Iraq. It is important that Kurdish officers at least say they are loyal to Iraq. Nechirvan responded with a long assessment of Kurdish feelings toward Iraq. "We have a long way to go. Kurds and Arabs are different nations, who have a tragic history of living together. It's impossible for Kurds to be loyal (to Baghdad) now. We have to try to build (that loyalty), but it can't be achieved overnight or by slogans. You must understand. Not this generation, but maybe the next." As he has in past meetings, Nechirvan accused Maliki of seeking to reduce Kurdish power ("cut us down to size") as he has done with Sunni (AQI) and Shi'a (Sadrist) rivals.

Denying Kurdish Responsibility for Attacks on Christians in Mosul

18. (C) S/A Krajieski asked about recent attacks on Christians in Mosul and the allegations that Kurdish officials were involved. He noted the damage being done to the KRG's reputation and called on KRG officials to work with the UN on

this. Nechirvan denied KRG involvement, saying "we are not responsible" and "it is not in our interest to do such a thing." He admitted that the KRG is losing the public diplomacy battle and said he had prepared an article rebutting the charges that will appear in the press over the next day or so. He accused Maliki of seeking to politicize the issue in order to raise tension. He said the KRG serves as a safe haven for Christians and has provided humanitarian assistance. In response to charges that Kurds perpetrated the attacks, Nechirvan said that some ethnic Kurds are members of terrorist groups like Ansar al-Islam and Ansar al-Sunna and these persons might be involved. He said that if the perpetrators of the attacks succeed in driving Christians from Mosul, the Kurds will be the next target.

Kurds want Broad Relationship with Turkey, Not Just Talks on PKK

19. (C) Reviewing KRG contact with the Turkish government, Nechirvan said there will be a visit to Erbil of a delegation from Turkish Intelligence (MTI) November 11. While the recent four-hour meeting between Masoud and Turkish envoy Ozcelik was "very good," the Turks "misunderstand the situation" if they think the KRG can turn the PKK on and off. Ozcelik appears to think that KRG hospitals treat PKK fighters, KRG trucks transport their weapons, and the KRG provides assistance, according to Nechirvan. "None of these things are true." Nechirvan said the Kurds had proposed enhanced intelligence exchanges with Turkey but will not engage the PKK militarily. S/A Krajewski said Ozcelik is under pressure himself to show that these talks result in increased counter-terrorism cooperation, which is in all of our interests. Nechirvan responded by saying that KRG officials understand the pressures of Turkish electoral politics in favor of immediate results, but the Turks should not talk to the KRG only about the PKK -- "that is not the way to treat" Masoud.

10. (C) The KRG and Turkey need to build up trust, he said. The Turkish media has decreased its attacks on Masoud, which has been helpful. On the other hand, he said, Iran has been providing the Turks with misinformation regarding KRG support for the PKK, while establishing its own contacts with the PKK. Nechirvan said that Masoud believes there must be a political solution to the PKK, which includes actions by Turkey to encourage PKK fighters to lay down their arms and go home. The KRG would be willing to host political meetings

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if that would be useful. (Comment: Nechirvan added, in what appeared to be a joke, that the KRG would even be willing to tell the Iraqi Army where to find the PKK if they think they are ready to fight the PKK, which clearly he thinks they are not. End comment.)

KRG Trip to Washington, and the Offer to Host U.S. Troops

11. (C) Masoud's visit to Washington received "a very warm reception," according to Nechirvan. The KRG saw the trip as an opportunity to say farewell and thank you to President Bush. It also was an opportunity to "talk about new ideas" with Washington officials, including exploring "different views" with State on SOFA, the hydrocarbons law, and Erbil-Baghdad relations. Nechirvan said that the Arab media vigorously attacking Masoud for extending an offer to host U.S. troops if SOFA negotiations fail, taking Masoud's remarks out of context. Nechirvan said he would be contacting journalists to clarify the remarks.

U.S. Election

12. (C) S/A Krajewski asked Nechirvan for a reaction to the U.S. election. After acknowledging that many Kurds hoped

McCain would win because they are grateful that the Bush administration toppled Saddam, Nechirvan said he preferred Obama, in part because he expected that McCain would continue current U.S. policy of supporting a strong central government in Baghdad. He also said he expects a decline in Iranian hostility toward Iraq in an Obama administration.

Masoud's Whereabouts

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¶13. (C) According to Nechirvan, Masoud was in Paris November 5 and planned to go to Vienna after that for a routine medical check-up. (Masoud has sought annual medical care in Vienna since an unsuccessful assassination attempt against him by Iraqi intelligence in 1979.) Masoud is scheduled to return to Erbil November 11. Nechirvan, DPM Barham Salih, and chief advisor Rosch Shaways will all travel to Baghdad in advance of the 11th, which will help determine whether Masoud stops in Baghdad before proceeding up north.

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